

THE EMPTY TOMB

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THE EMPTY TOMB

*The disappearance of Jesus as related
in the letters of Caiaphas the High Priest.*

JAMES MARTIN



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THE EMPTY TOMB:
The disappearance of Jesus
as related in the letters of Caiaphas the High Priest.

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Here is an exciting reconstruction of what went on behind the scenes in the minds of Jesus' enemies at the time of the crucifixion. Caiaphas, High Priest in Jerusalem, is, in Mr. Martin's imaginative creation, the writer of these letters to his predecessor, Annas, now convalescing at a Dead Sea resort. At first the followers of the crucified Nazarene are merely a nuisance, gradually quieting down after some disturbing talk about their Master's rising from the dead. Then suddenly, just seven weeks after the execution of the carpenter-leader, the affair flares up again and Caiaphas, in frustrated rage, cannot understand the perilous obstinacy of these peasants and fishermen.

—James Martin has created a thrilling book in the manner of C. S. Lewis, one that

shows the crucifixion and the following weeks through the eyes of an outsider—an outsider who finds himself, against all his will and prejudice, forced to doubt his disbelief. He even begins to suspect that perhaps these fanatics have something here—but no, he is too sensible for that!

Open *The Empty Tomb* to any page for a stirring glimpse into the life of the Christian church in its first days—despised, persecuted, yet with a strange magnetism almost beyond comprehension.

TO
HEATHER
AND
LESLEY

Author's Preface

THE following pages contain some letters which purport to have been written by Caiaphas, the ruling High Priest of the Jews, to Annas, his predecessor in that office, during the twelve to eighteen months following the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. But I make no claim to authenticity on their behalf. Frankly, I am personally most doubtful of that. They were revealed to me as I pondered the happenings of the first Easter, and each of them, I noticed, bore the signature of Caiaphas. I noticed at the same time, however, that they contain many anachronisms of thought and of phrase, a feature which may suggest that they are, after all, no more than the creation of my own mind. Nevertheless, they seem to demand the conclusion that, if not actual letters of Caiaphas, they are in the main such letters as Caiaphas might well have penned. And so I have decided that others than myself may care to read them through.

Letter One

My dear Annas,

I trust that your indisposition is already beginning to show signs of improvement. It was a great pity that it came upon you just when it did and prevented your being present at the final scenes of the play in which you yourself have occupied such a prominent role. But perhaps my report of its successful conclusion will have a tonic effect upon you.

Yes, Annas, it is all over and final success is ours. Jesus of Nazareth is dead. The Galilaean impostor met a just end today on a Roman gallows. Our anxieties are over, God be praised!

This news is just as you would be expecting it, for it is just what we had planned together. But I am sorry to say that our objective was not finally gained without more difficulty than we had anticipated. Despite my having seen him last night and prepared the ground, Pilate proved strangely stubborn and unco-operative this morning. (The sooner he is out of the way the better, is my opinion!) He showed great reluctance to bring in the death sentence that we were demanding and which last night he seemed willing enough to grant. I cannot understand his change of attitude, unless he was feeling peevish at being troubled so early in the morning and was determined to be awkward. I cannot think why else he should have been so perverse. After all,

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

it was a small enough favour that we were seeking—no more than the elimination of a troublesome and totally unimportant peasant.

Whatever the reason, Pilate held out on us for quite some time. "The man is innocent of any crime," he kept saying, "I am going to release him." Even now, when it is all safely and successfully over, the memory of his obstinacy makes me furious. As if I, the High Priest, would ask the life of any man unless he truly deserved to die. The mere fact that I requested the Galilaean's life should have been quite sufficient for Pilate and he ought to have signed the death warrant without further ado. But, no! Such a course would have been too simple for the great Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judaea! He had to use the opportunity to make it plain who was in the driver's seat. He had to demonstrate who it was that held the power. He had to fling in our faces once again the hated fact that we are a subject people—he'll do that sort of thing just once too often, mark my words!

What a time of shilly-shallying we had to undergo! First he would say that he was refusing to pronounce sentence of death. Then he would take the prisoner through for another examination. Then he would send him along to Herod for his opinion on the matter. Then he would taunt us with another threatened refusal. And so it went on.

I think that what angered me more than anything else during this exasperating performance was the bearing of the prisoner. How I hated the way he kept perfectly calm while all around tempers were becoming frayed and feelings were rising high! A veritable storm was raging back and forth

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

about his head and the cries for his blood were steadily growing noisier and more savage, but he hardly ever spoke and never once showed any trace of fear. He carried himself just as he had done when he was standing his trial before us, with that confounded air of superiority which I found infuriating then and which makes my blood boil now.

But in the end, we put Pilate in his place. All this time I had been making sure that the crowd was being steadily whipped up into greater and greater frenzy, until now they were literally screaming for the Galilaean's death. Despite this, Pilate seemed—stubborn fool that he is—as if he might persist in his refusal to pass the sentence. Just then, in a moment of inspiration, I sent someone round to yell from the back of the crowd, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar's." That did it! Pilate understood the threat at once. He knew that, if he failed to do as we wished, a complaint would find its way to Rome, suggesting that Pontius Pilate had encouraged a seditionist. With his past record of trouble, this would almost certainly mean the end of his career and he was prudent enough to see immediately that it was a risk he could not take.

He gave in without further delay. The necessary orders were issued and very soon afterwards Jesus was hanging from his cross. What a relief as well as a pleasure it was to see him there! I had been growing worried about the length of time that Pilate was holding us up, but here the deed was done and it was still only nine o'clock. It was just as well the job was got through so early in the day. Had it been much later, there might have been a deal of trouble for us.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

Apart from a very few of the Galilaean's close friends (the majority had taken care to make themselves scarce) hardly anyone was around except for city residents and it was reasonably easy to incite them to fever pitch against the upstart whom we desired to destroy. We might have had a much more difficult task on our hands if many of those country yokels had been present who cheered him into the city in that disgusting exhibition on Sunday. Fortunately, with Pilate giving in as he did, the hour was not far enough advanced for any number of them to have got wind of what was afoot. As a result, they were one problem with which we did not have to contend and the executioners were able to pinion him to the cross without incident.

It was a glorious sight to see him there! It is a pity that you were not able to leave your house, Annas, for you would have enjoyed seeing him in his death-throes. If others have crazy notions such as his, this morning's work will surely have demonstrated to them that it does not pay to cross the Sanhedrin.

He did not last very long—which was rather a disappointment—and expired at three o'clock in the afternoon. It was somewhat surprising at the end. You would almost have thought that he had just said to himself, "I'll die now," and proceeded to lay down his life. However, that is really beside the point. The point is that he is well and truly dead.

In fact, he is not only dead, but buried as well. Yes, Annas, he is buried and buried decently—he who deserved only to have his body thrown to the beasts. What makes

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

this matter worse, his burial was carried through by two of our own Sanhedrin—Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea. Traitorous dogs! I have had my suspicions of them for some time—do you recall that rumour some time ago which said that Nicodemus had been paying a nocturnal call on the Galilæan mountebank?—and this shows that they have really been on his side all the time. Take it from me, they will suffer for their sins. I will see to that!

Jesus was no sooner dead than Joseph went sneaking off to Pilate and wheedled his permission to bury the body. This obtained, he and Nicodemus gave it a hurried embalming and laid the corpse to rest in that imposing new tomb that Joseph owns in the garden that adjoins the place of execution.

It was a despicable act of treachery but it is of little real consequence now. We have accomplished what we set out to do and have done so a lot more easily (and a lot more cheaply) than I had feared. That blaspheming impostor of a carpenter is out of the way for ever and we will not have to put up with his dangerous talk and mischievous trouble-making any more.

You may rest assured that we will not have any trouble from his disciples either. My agents inform me that they are in a state of the deepest despair and bitterest disillusionment. Their leader's death appears to have broken them completely—which is no more than their just deserts for allowing themselves to be taken in by such an obvious fraud—and they are all waiting in fear and trembling to see what is going to happen to them. As a matter of fact, I do not

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

think I will bother to do anything to them at all. It is not worth the effort. The affair is finished anyway.

What a blessed relief it is that the matter is at an end! It had become a positive obsession these past few weeks, monopolizing my time and my attention. I shall be glad to be able—once this festival and its requirements are over—to turn my energies again to those regular matters of business which have of necessity been permitted to slip badly into arrears.

I trust you will sleep well, Annas, and all the better for this report which, in accordance with your expressed wish, I send as quickly as possible. I know that I for my part shall sleep very soundly. I deserve it. I have done a good day's work today.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Two

My dear Annas,

Bad news! The body of Jesus has disappeared from its grave. I do not know how this has happened nor do I know what it may signify, but I do not like it and I smell trouble. It is most exasperating to have this development just when it seemed that the affair of Jesus of Nazareth was all neatly parcelled up and laid aside.

It is obvious, of course, that the Galilaean's followers must have stolen his body, but so far I have been unable to figure out how on earth they managed to do it. For one thing, I had taken the precaution of having the tomb guarded. It was not that I had any expectation of anything of this sort. On the contrary, knowing how badly hit Jesus' followers had been by his death, I was perfectly certain that they would not have the slightest further interest in the remains of the man who had deceived them so cruelly. Nevertheless, I was determined to be safeguarded against all eventualities and I decided that it would do no harm to take precautions against the possibility, however absurdly remote it might appear, of some of them coming along and making a scene at the grave, wanting to gawk at the body or the like. So I went to Pilate and, although he was like a bear with a sore head because of the way he had been bested earlier in the day, he grudgingly granted me permission to arrange for a guard on the tomb. Accordingly, I detailed some of the

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

Temple Police to maintain a constant watch; but what a mess of things they have made. Very early this morning they came running to tell me that the grave was empty and that the body had vanished. I had a terrible job trying to make sense of what they had to tell. You never heard such a farrago of nonsense in all your life. They kept saying that in the dead of night they became gripped by a sense that something strange had taken place concerning the dead man beside whose resting-place they were stationed. This sense became so overpowering that they felt compelled to open the grave and see for themselves. So they pushed aside the large round stone that sealed the mouth of the tomb and went in—to find that the body was gone, although its grave-wrappings were still there, lying on the ledge where the body had been. It is a weird tale and I am convinced that the truth is that the guards fell asleep on the job and this fantastic story is an attempt to cover up their negligence. For the body is undoubtedly gone. I went myself to the grave to check on their report and found things exactly as had been stated, even to the graveclothes lying on the ledge.

The Nazarene's supporters are at the root of it, of course. There can be no doubt of that. But, frankly, I am extremely puzzled as to how they managed to pull it off. Even on the assumption that the guard had dropped off to sleep, it would still appear, on the surface, an impossibility that they could have successfully overcome all the practical obstacles that were in their way. Moreover, such an undertaking must have required a most meticulously planned scheme, and to the best of our knowledge—and we know them all pretty

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

well—there is not one of Jesus' band who could be remotely considered as being capable of the organization involved. What is more, judging by the state they were in on Friday, I would have been prepared to stake my life on it that none of them would have had either the inclination or the courage to look near the grave or to show any further interest at all in Jesus of Nazareth.

All this goes to make the case a most perplexing one. On the face of it, one would be inclined to declare quite categorically that the Nazarene's followers could have had nothing to do with the disappearance of his body. Yet it is obvious that they must be responsible, for what other explanation is there? Although at the moment I am completely at sea as to how it was done, I have no fear that we shall find out soon, for our intelligence system is good.

I cannot deny that this occurrence has upset me a bit. True, it does not matter greatly. Jesus is dead and nothing can alter that fact or take our victory from us. But I have a marked dislike for unexplained happenings and I shall not be content until I get to the bottom of this one. As soon as I do I will let you know.

I hope that your improvement in health is continuing and that you will be quite fit enough to carry out your intention of leaving the city at the close of the festival to take a cure down at the Dead Sea. I am sure that will do you all the good in the world. You always maintain, at any rate, that a spell there gives you more benefit than anything else ever does.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Three

My dear Annas,

You may be surprised to have another letter from me so soon. The reason is that I have gained a little further information which I know you would wish to share as quickly as possible. I think I have discovered the purpose lying behind the theft of the body of Jesus—and a fantastic purpose it is. My spies tell me that his disciples are saying amongst themselves that their master is risen from the grave and that he is alive again. Can you imagine anything more preposterous? Or anything more offensive?

True, they appear so far to be confining their talk of Jesus' resurrection to their own intimate circle and do not show any tendency as yet to make it public. But no doubt they are simply biding their time for some reason or other, and will come out into the open with it when they think the time is ripe.

Mark you, Annas, I cannot for the life of me see what they can possibly hope to gain by this fabrication of theirs. Not a soul will listen to them. Who could possibly be simple enough to be taken in with a story like that? Everybody knows that Jesus is dead and everybody knows how he died—and nobody is going to believe that he is come to life once more. If they are anxious to perpetuate his memory in some way, they ought to have thought up a better scheme than this. Dead men stay dead, everybody knows that, and these Nazarenes are simply going to get themselves laughed

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

at if and when they come out with any claim that their Jesus has risen from the grave.

I know, of course, that the Greeks have some tales in their mythology that have to do with gods dying and rising again from the dead. But that does not have any relevance here and will not be of any assistance to the Nazarenes. It has never been suggested that these Greek legends are anything other than legends. They were never put forward as having any basis in historical fact and no one ever thinks of them as such. No one, indeed, ever takes them very seriously at all. In any case, our people—apart from the scholars—know little or nothing about them and are well enough versed in our scriptures and our doctrine to be sure to scoff the Nazarenes to silence if they are ever foolish enough to try to tell them that Jesus is risen. No one has ever risen from the dead before and it baffles me how these misguided fools can hope to convince anyone that Jesus has done what no other person in history has managed to do.

And yet it seems to me most likely that this is just what they are intending to try. I can see no other explanation of their stealing of his body and now their talk of his being alive again. They must be quite mad, but their madness is, unfortunately, an annoyance to us and the sooner we get this incident finally closed the better.

Once we find out where they have put the body, that will scotch their intentions, and we should not be very long before we succeed. It cannot be far away and I have a large squad of men searching for it. Frankly, I thought they would have discovered its hiding-place by this time, but those who

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

were responsible for moving it have obviously made a very good job of secreting it. We shall find it, however, never fear, and that will be that.

Meantime, I have seen to it that the guards who were on duty at the tomb will tell the proper tale. If I am right in assuming that the Nazarenes' intentions are to make public their absurd claim that Jesus is raised from the dead, it is all the better to be ready for them. Even though they have no chance of any sensible person listening to such a tale, far less believing it, it is wise to make doubly sure. Accordingly I have already taken steps to anticipate their probable next move and I have briefed the guards with a story that the followers of Jesus stole away his body under cover of night while its custodians were dozing. That story will already be current on the streets and in the bazaars and will serve the double purpose of explaining Jesus' empty tomb—a fact which is already public knowledge—and of making the populace even less favorably disposed towards the Nazarenes.

These surprise developments are irritating—especially when we had thought this whole matter satisfactorily disposed of—but they are of no major consequence. You may rest assured, Annas, that the case of Jesus of Nazareth will very soon be nothing more than past history. I wish, however, it did not contain so many puzzling features. I do not like things that I do not completely comprehend.

I hope that your recovery continues. I shall do my very best to spend some time with you before you leave for the Dead Sea.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Four

My dear Annas,

I cannot express how sorry I am that I did not, after all, manage to call on you before you left for the Dead Sea. Several of those simply unavoidable things descended upon me at quite the most unwelcome time and I was unable to get free of them before the hour of your departure had passed. I hope you had a comfortable journey and that this letter finds you already pleasantly settled in your lake-side residence. I hope, too, that you are already beginning to feel the benefit of your change of air.

My failure to see you and have a talk with you before you left the city makes me all the more grateful for your forethought and consideration in writing a letter to leave for me in the event of not seeing me personally. I have that letter now and I thank you for it, particularly for its wise observations and suggestions concerning the disappearance of Jesus' body from its tomb. I have taken note of these and given full consideration to them.

I fully admit the criticisms you make of my theory that the followers of Jesus must have stolen his body out of the tomb. I am aware that it has obvious weaknesses—I referred to some of them myself—but, when all is said and done, it still seems to me the only possible explanation.

I agree that the theory would appear to involve the Nazarenes in difficulties of a practical nature so severe as to

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

be quite insuperable. The undertaking, you say, must have involved several men, for they had heavy manual work to do in opening the grave, carrying the body some distance and then reburying it in another place; the difficulties with which they had to contend would be greatly aggravated by their necessity to do all that they had to do under cover of darkness and to do it also with as great dispatch as possible; they had to do all this under the very noses of our guard; and yet, if the theory be true, this group of men somehow managed to remove the body of Jesus from its tomb without being detected. What is more, they managed to hide it so successfully in some other resting-place that so far my men have been unable to locate it. You say that such considerations render the theory tremendously difficult to believe. Of course they do, but what real alternative do we have?

I freely admit, too, the weight of the ethical and psychological considerations that you adduce against the notion that the disciples of Jesus might have removed his body surreptitiously from the tomb. Jesus was terribly and dangerously deluded, but he taught his adherents a code of living that demanded the strictest honesty and the utmost integrity. It is most difficult, therefore, to think of them as carrying through in cold blood a premeditated act of deceit such as this, to steal their leader's body and then pretend that he had risen.

You know that I am not a fool, Annas, and I, too, can see these points very clearly indeed; and I realize that, on the face of it, they would seem to make it quite impossible to conceive of the Nazarene's followers doing any such thing.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

But we have to deal with fact as well as with theory, and the fact is that the tomb of Jesus is empty. That emptiness can be explained in only one way. No matter how impossible in practice it may appear, no matter how morally impossible or how psychologically impossible, the followers of Jesus *must* have taken the body. How else can we account for the tomb being empty? (And it *is* empty, you know. I have been to see for myself and there is no doubt about it.)

And I say this after full and fair consideration of the suggestion you put forward in your letter. You suggest that a more likely explanation is that Jesus was not really dead but merely in a coma and that he revived in the cool of the grave, made his escape and rejoined his disciples. With all the respect in the world, my dear Annas, I must say that I am surprised at you. Your theory appears to be positively riddled with holes!

For one thing, do you seriously mean to suggest that the Roman execution party could have been in error about whether their prisoner was dead or not? Their task was to end the lives of the criminals committed to them for crucifixion and part of that task consisted in ensuring that each prisoner was dead before his body was allowed to be taken down from the cross. I am sufficiently acquainted with the ruthless efficiency of these Roman executioners to find it quite impossible to imagine them ever making the mistake that your suggestion demands—and so must you, I submit, Annas, if you are honest with yourself. Since the Roman soldiery attending to the execution were satisfied that Jesus was dead, then he *was* dead.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

Furthermore, Annas, I wonder if you have had sufficient time to see all that your theory involves. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that Jesus was not dead but only comatose when taken down from the cross! Your theory still runs up against insuperable difficulties. You suggest that this comatose Jesus regained consciousness in the cool of the tomb and made his escape. It seems to me that this suggestion overlooks certain facts.

To begin with, even if still alive when taken from the cross, Jesus must have been very near to death's door. He had passed through a gruelling overnight experience which must have taken severe toll of his mental and physical strength; then he had been given a flogging, a punishment which, as you know, is often itself enough to kill a man; and after that he was crucified. Even if Jesus was not dead when removed from the gallows—although, personally, I have no doubt that he was—he could not have been far from it.

Next, before he was placed in the tomb, this almost-but-not-quite dead Jesus was enswathed in masses of linen interlaid with spices—Joseph and Nicodemus were seen to do this—which would have the inevitable effect of pinioning his arms to his sides. Then he was entombed and the tomb in which he was placed, remember, was hewn out of the rock and sealed by rolling a massive circular stone across its entrance.

Your theory, my dear Annas, asks us to believe that this Jesus, weak almost to the point of physical helplessness and all but dead, revived when laid on the cold slab of the tomb and, bursting free of the linen bonds enswathing him,

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

managed, *from the inside of the tomb*, to roll the stone away and to escape without detection. No, Annas, if anything is certain, it is that this particular theory fails to meet the facts of the case.

This is not to forget that my own assertion about the disciples of Jesus having stolen his body is itself studded with difficulties. Nevertheless, the difficulties confronting it are not nearly so overwhelming as those confronting your theory and I am going to abide by it.

All the same, I wish we could trace the body. We are looking for it everywhere but still without result. You remark in your letter, "I suppose you will have 'interrogated' the Nazarenes." Yes, Annas, I have, as you say, "interrogated" them—but to no avail. Despite using every means of pressure at our disposal, we were able to extract neither the slightest admission nor the smallest grain of evidence from any of them. To a man they denied all knowledge of the body's removal. We shall just need to find it by our own efforts, and the sooner the better.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Five

My dear Annas,

I am glad to learn that you are comfortable and already feel refreshed in health.

The matter which occupies your letter as fully as it now occupies my mind continues to grow more puzzling and more exasperating. You could never fully appreciate it without seeing it for yourself, but a most extraordinary change has taken place in the followers of the Nazarene. I have never in all my life known anything so astonishing.

On the day that Jesus was killed they were the picture of abject misery. (We had them under close observation, of course.) If I had not hated them so much I think I would have been forced to feel sorry for them. What a disaster it obviously was to them that their leader should have come to such a terrible and such a shameful end. They had thought, of course, that he was Messiah (the shocking effrontery of their blasphemy!) and no doubt they were banking on being given good positions in the new Messianic Kingdom that he would bring in. What wonderful dreams and what wonderful hopes they must have cherished—and then he was crucified. I can just imagine how they felt! Almost in an instant all their fine dreams and starry hopes were smashed to smithereens. They had been so sure of him and of his power—and now their faith was shown to be grievously misplaced after all.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

What a crushing blow we dealt them when we succeeded in nailing Jesus to the cross. This showed them how utterly wrong they had been in their fantastic notions concerning him. It demonstrated conclusively that he was not Messiah as they had fondly and foolishly imagined, for, as the Scripture¹ says, "a hanged man is accursed by God"; and their disappointment threw them into the very depths of despair.

I can assure you, Annas, that I am not in the least exaggerating when I tell you that they were rendered as broken in spirit as men could ever be; living pictures of misery and grief.

And they were afraid, desperately afraid! They were afraid of us and of what we might do to them. We had slain Jesus, their leader, and they were terrified that it would be their turn next, so frightened that all weekend they scarcely stirred beyond the threshold of the house in which they took shelter when Jesus was put under arrest. They were as craven a pack of curs as ever it could be your misfortune to see.

But they are like that no longer! The strange thing is—it is well-nigh unbelievable—that they are now quite changed. They are going about the streets of the city quite openly and apparently without any fear. They are so brazen, in fact, that you might almost think Jerusalem belonged to them, impudent dogs! No, they show no trace now of the terror that held them in its grip. And their sadness is all vanished too. They appear happy and go about smiling and laughing,

¹ Deuteronomy xxi. 23.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

as if they had not a care in the world, and with an air of confidence and superiority that makes my blood boil. You should see them, Annas. They are for all the world like cats who have spilled their milk and then found a saucer of cream.

The obvious conclusion would seem to be that the radical change of heart they have undergone and the infuriating air of triumph that they have adopted are due to their thinking that they have bested us in this matter of the body. For, try as we might and try as we certainly have done, we simply cannot find it. We have searched everywhere in Jerusalem and its environs but it seems to have vanished into thin air. It is plainly impossible for them to have moved it any further afield in the limited time at their disposal, to say nothing of the very great practical difficulties attending their theft, most of which would grow no less with every step that they took.

How I wish we could locate it! We have looked in every conceivable spot and have gone over all the ground with a fine-toothed comb—and all without result. They must have covered their tracks with diabolical cunning and they must have devised a hiding-place of remarkable subtlety. But we must discover it eventually and that will be the end of this sorry and humiliating farce.

I said above that the “obvious” explanation of the change in these men would seem to be their feeling of having put one over on us. There is, however, another feature of the matter with which I must acquaint you. The Nazarenes not only are asserting that their leader is risen from the dead but, it seems, actually *believe* that he is. My agents are in no doubt

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

on this point. The Jesus group, they tell me, are indisputably sincere in their conviction that Jesus is come alive again after his execution. By what mental process they can possibly have come to hold such an idea is beyond me! The conclusion that they had surreptitiously removed Jesus' body from its grave and then proceeded to declare that he was risen would have struck me as preposterously far-fetched, did the facts of the case not demand it. But this latest development presents the workings of their minds in an even more bizarre light than that. I would have thought it utterly impossible for men to steal a dead person's body out of its tomb and then convince themselves that he was risen from the grave. Yet there it is! There seems to be no doubt about it. They really do believe that Jesus is risen and alive.

So far they have made no attempt to publicize this resurrection claim of theirs. All the better if they never do. Not that it would make much difference. Nobody would be foolish enough to listen to them. In any case, I have it well noised abroad that they themselves were responsible for robbing the grave and that should put an end to any remote possibility of anyone giving a second thought to their nonsense. Nevertheless, I hope they do not make themselves any more of a nuisance than they already are.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Six

My dear Annas,

Your Dead Sea cure must be as effective as we all hoped it would be, for you are just as determined as ever—you and your “Swoon Theory”! Here you are, in the letter which I received less than an hour ago, insisting once again that it is absurd to maintain that the body of Jesus could have been stolen away by his friends. You argue that, quite apart from the considerations adduced in your previous letter, this new development (i.e. the disciples’ *sincere* belief in Jesus’ resurrection) demonstrates the impossibility of holding to the view that they removed the body. If they had done so, you contend, and were thus well aware that Jesus’ body lay mouldering in a certain known spot, it would have been quite outside the realm of possibility that they should ever then have come to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead.

This, you maintain, merely serves to make doubly certain the conclusion that is inevitably demanded in any case by the transformation that has been effected in the followers of Jesus. That they should have been so drastically changed all at once, as it were, cannot under any circumstances be explained, you argue, if the whole affair is nothing more than a deliberate and conscious act of deceit on their part. If, you say, the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body from the tomb, they could not and would not have been changed as they have been.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

There are, you contend, many features of the case that refuse to be explained on the basis of a theory of the body's theft by the friends of Jesus. But, you go on, these same features are explicable on the basis of the assumption that Jesus was never really dead and escaped from his grave to rejoin his followers. For, if this is the true reconstruction of events, it not only accounts for the emptiness of the tomb but also adequately accounts for the Nazarenes' belief that their leader is risen and for the resultant great change in their mind and outlook.

I must admit, Annas, that not only are you persistent but that you plead your case well. You make your theory sound very plausible and it certainly would dispose of some of the difficulties confronting us. Nevertheless, it seems to me quite unable to stand up to rigorous examination.

I have previously outlined some of the obvious objections to your theory—chiefly the extreme (practical) unlikelihood of such an occurrence. I do not need and I do not wish to say all that again. I will content myself with reaffirming that the improbability is so great as to be equivalent, for me at any rate, to an impossibility (1) of Jesus being still alive when placed in the tomb, and (2) assuming him to be only comatose, of his being able, alone and unaided, to get free from the graveclothes and from the tomb and to make his way undetected to his disciples. I am not going to labour these points any further, but I have some additional remarks to make.

Supposing that, for the sake of argument, we were to grant it as a possibility that Jesus could have revived in the tomb

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

and escaped, as you suggest, we would still—contrary to your view—be no nearer a satisfactory explanation of his followers' belief that he was risen from the dead. If I may say so respectfully, my dear Annas, had you given the matter more thought you must have realized this for yourself. For this returned Jesus must have been in very poor shape. He must have come to his disciples in a state of nakedness and of extreme weakness, requiring from them not only immediate treatment for his wounds but much care and attention. Can you honestly reckon it credible that such a pitiable creature should inspire in them a conviction that he was the conqueror of death—for that is the conviction which possesses them?

Not only so, Annas. Supposing your theory to be the true version of the matter, where is he now? How do you account for the fact that we have found no trace of him either alive or dead? Remember that we have been searching diligently and painstakingly and ruthlessly for his body. Remember, too, that my spies have been keeping a close watch on his friends. How do you account for it, if yours is the correct way of it, that no sign of him has been detected?

Why, to push this point further, does he not make a public appearance? Surely that, from their point of view, would be the thing to do. What a sensation it would cause! What an impression it would make on the populace! What a trouble it would cause for us! I cannot think that they would keep him hidden away in secret if they had him alive.

No, my dear Annas, I find it quite impossible to accept

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

your theory and I humbly suggest that, when you consider these points I have made, you yourself will find it impossible to hold to it any longer.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Seven

My dear Annas,

I feel that I may owe you an apology. The case of Jesus of Nazareth continues to grow more puzzling and I am beginning to wonder if, after all, your theory may not be right. It still seems to me totally absurd and quite impossible and, if I were not nearly at my wits' end trying to find a pattern into which the known facts will fit, I would never consider it. The arguments that I have already cited against your "Swoon Theory" appear to me as valid as ever and my reason tells me that it just cannot be true. But my own theory, of the Nazarenes' stealing the body from its grave and then persuading themselves that Jesus was risen, seems to have come to grief. It is no longer simply a case of the Nazarenes' believing that Jesus is risen. We have ascertained that they are actually seeing him. My informants are adamant on that point. They themselves have not been able to see Jesus, but they affirm that it is beyond doubt that his followers have. I have examined them and re-examined them and I have been unable to budge them from their position. The followers of Jesus, they are sure, are actually seeing him. He is not staying with them but they are having meetings with him.

If this is true, and I am reluctantly compelled to admit that it looks as if it must be, it means that Jesus is alive. That in turn must mean that your theory—impossible as it seems—

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

must be right. There is no other alternative, unless, of course, my dear Annas, we are prepared to accept this preposterous claim that Jesus is risen. That, however, you and I know to be the greatest absurdity of all. If there are such things as degrees of impossibility, this must be the most impossible of impossibilities. No matter how much evidence were to be produced for Jesus' resurrection, any other hypothesis at all would still be more likely than that.

So it would seem that we must, after all, adopt the "Swoon Theory" that you have been advocating so strongly, and yet, you know, Annas, I still cannot see how it can possibly be true. The facts are all against it. I am prepared to agree with you only because I can see nothing else for it. If only there were some other explanation—Oh, what a fool I am! How stupid can a man get, I wonder? I see it now. Why did I not see it before? I can only plead tiredness and haste.

I was tempted, Annas, to destroy what I have written and to start this letter afresh. But, on second thoughts, I have decided to let it stand so that you shall see for yourself how open-minded a man I am and how prepared to give full and fair consideration to other people's points of view. As you will observe, I was willing to accept your opinion if it seemed to be the best available interpretation of the circumstances, in spite of its patent unsuitability at many points.

Now, however, I can see a better explanation which, I admit, I ought to have seen from the beginning. The solution must obviously be this: that the followers of Jesus are suffering from hallucinations. That would meet all the facts of the case—the empty tomb, their belief that they have seen

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

Jesus risen and the resultant spectacular transformation that has taken place in them.

It is clear to me now what must have happened. After stealing the body of Jesus and secreting it somewhere, with the intention of pretending that Jesus was risen, they became so obsessed with their proposed pretence that they came to believe in it themselves. So strong did this self-delusion grow and so utterly convinced did they become of Jesus' resurrection that they began to expect to see him at any minute. Once this expectation seized hold of them the inevitable consequence was that they should fancy that they did see him. That, it now appears to me, must be the explanation of the strange set of circumstances with which we have to deal. I realize only too well that it does not cater fully nor, at times, with anything like complete satisfaction for all the features involved; but it seems to me the best explanation available and I am going to abide by it.

I trust that you continue to improve in health.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Eight

My dear Annas,

The status of the Jesus affair continues to give cause for disquiet. Our failure to locate him, alive or dead, becomes more serious as well as more exasperating with every day that passes. I have a feeling that there must be some factor in the case or some aspect of it that, despite all my careful thought, I have been overlooking; and that is the real reason for this letter. I do not have any new matter to report. I thought, however, that it might prove helpful if I set down on paper a review of the case as it has developed up till now. By so doing I am hoping that we may gain some fresh light on it, either through my mind or through yours. It ought at least to clarify our thought on the matter, even if it gives us no fresh illumination.

Well, then, the facts are these. Jesus of Nazareth was arrested on Thursday night, 14 Nisan, and, after examination by the Sanhedrin, was taken before Pilate early on the Friday morning. There the death sentence was passed upon him and, after scourging, he was marched to the place of execution and crucified. In the middle of the afternoon he was officially pronounced dead and shortly afterwards his body was taken down from the cross, hurriedly and partially embalmed and laid in the hitherto unused tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. (It was Joseph, you will remember, aided by Nicodemus, who attended to these last rites, after obtaining

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

permission from Pilate to do so.) I set a guard on the tomb in case of incident or interference, but before dawn on the Sunday morning the grave was found to be empty and the body had vanished. Shortly after this a most remarkable change was observed in those who had been the followers of Jesus. From being terrified and despondent men, as they had been on the Friday, they were transformed into creatures of confidence and joy, not to say of boastful arrogance. In addition, they are known to have been asserting privately—although not, so far at least, publicly—that Jesus is risen from the dead. Not only so, they claim to have seen him after his resurrection and actually appear to believe that they have done so.

The foregoing is a summary narrative of the sequence of events. The essential facts are these:

- (1) That Jesus was crucified and, after examination, pronounced to be dead.
- (2) That his body has disappeared from the tomb.
- (3) That no trace has yet been found of the vanished body.
- (4) That his disciples claim that he is risen and that they have seen him.
- (5) That they sincerely believe what they say.
- (6) That they have undergone a tremendous mental change from depression to exaltation.

These are the facts. Our problem is how to explain them. It goes without saying that no attention need be paid to the Nazarenes' claim that Jesus is risen. You are as well aware as I am, Annas, how utterly impossible that explanation is.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

It is not easy, however, to be sure what is the correct interpretation of the facts. We need to find an explanation that will take cognizance of them all and I can find no more than two, no matter how remotely possible, which qualify under this head. These are, on the one hand, what we shall call the "Swoon Theory" (yours) and, on the other hand, what we shall call the "Theft Theory".

The first of these is to the effect that a mistake was made by the Roman executioners in their examination of Jesus on the Friday afternoon and that, although certified as dead, he was, in actual fact, still alive but in a deep coma whose appearance closely resembled death. When laid in the tomb, the cold of the grave and of the slab on which he lay acted as a reviving shock upon Jesus and brought him back to consciousness. He worked his way free of the linen in which he was encased and then succeeded in moving aside the stone door of the tomb and made his escape. This he did without being observed and, managing to rejoin his disciples still undetected, he convinced them by his reappearance that he had overcome death and risen from the grave.

At first sight, this theory might appear to cover adequately all six of the salient factors in the case. I submit, however, Annas, that a closer examination shows that this is not so. In actual fact it adequately meets the demands only of points (2) and (4). I suppose that, at a pinch, it *could* be regarded as meeting the demands of the other four points, too, but this result could be achieved only at considerable cost in terms of intellectual honesty.

Take point (1). It is, to say the least of it, extremely

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

unlikely that Jesus was still alive when removed from the cross, particularly when those attending to the execution (part of whose task it was to ascertain this very fact) were satisfied that he was dead. Or take point (3). If Jesus is still alive, where is he? Why have we not discovered him? How is it that no one at all seems to have set eyes on him except for his few close friends? He must, after all, be living somewhere, and must be eating and sleeping. Or take points (5) and (6). While this theory would account all right for the Nazarenes' belief that they had seen Jesus subsequent to his crucifixion, does it credibly account for their sincere belief that he has risen triumphant from the grave? He must, when he reappeared amongst them, have presented the complete antithesis of a figure of triumph, weak, wounded and ill as he undoubtedly must have been. Could such a figure have created the conviction they hold or have led to the change that has taken place in them?

Let us look now, Annas, at the "Theft Theory". This is to the effect that the friends of Jesus secretly removed his body from the tomb under cover of darkness during Saturday night-Sunday morning and hid it away in a place so far undetected by us. This they did with the intention of making out that Jesus was risen and their subterfuge came to possess their minds so completely that they came eventually to believe in it themselves. The upshot was that their imagination began to run riot and they came to fancy that Jesus, risen from the grave, was appearing to them. This theory, while by no means free from difficulties, appears to cover the salient points much more adequately than the other.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

Points (1), (2), (4) and (6) present no difficulties at all to this theory. Point (5), however, brings it into conflict with the difficulty of conceiving how such self-delusion on the part of the Nazarenes could follow directly from a fraud they had themselves perpetrated. It must be admitted that this is a not inconsiderable difficulty, but it need not be regarded as insuperable. At first sight it may seem very unlikely that self-delusion of this nature could ever come about, but it cannot be counted impossible, especially with people like the Nazarenes who are patently mentally unbalanced. We are left with point (3), the still missing body, but that need mean no more than that those who moved the body were extremely ingenious in their choice of a hiding-place for it.

These are our two possible theories. I will be honest, Annas. I consider neither of them anything like as convincing as I would have wished. But one of them has got to be the truth and that one, it seems to me, must be the "Theft Theory", which has much less to be said against it than the other. This, therefore, shall be our official position on the matter. In any case, we are already openly committed to it. Admittedly, so long as we are unable to locate the body, we are unable to prove the theory right. But, then, neither can anyone prove it wrong. So we are quite safe in advocating it officially and sooner or later we are bound to get the corroboration we seek.

I hope you are still enjoying your stay down at the Dead Sea and continuing to profit from it.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Nine

My dear Annas,

I am disappointed that you have no constructive suggestion to offer in the letter I have just received. I had hoped that the fairly long summary of the situation which I elaborated to you might have helped to produce some shaft of fresh insight. But, no doubt still—and understandably—preoccupied with your “Swoon Theory”, you do little other than make further criticisms of my “Theft Theory”.

In particular, you allege that the known facts render absurd any attempt to explain the “appearances” of Jesus to his disciples in terms of self-delusion or hallucination. I must applaud your masterly pleading here. You certainly make the most of your case. All the same, it quite fails to shake my opinion, and I do not regard your contentions as nearly so formidable as you have tried to make them appear. However, I do not intend to enter into a protracted argument over this. I have already admitted that my interpretation of the facts is not a completely satisfactory solution. But I would maintain it is undoubtedly the most satisfactory that can be found and I think we should let matters rest there for the time being. Eventually, I hope, we shall find the answers to the questions that are still outstanding.

In any case, there does not seem to be any need for urgency or for anxiety. To begin with I was sure that this business

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

spelled trouble for us. It seemed certain to me that once the Nazarenes had acquired a belief in the resurrection of their leader—whether through deliberate fraud or through delusion makes little difference—they would inevitably want to try to force their belief on the public. So far, however, they have not made the slightest attempt to do so and it begins to look as if they will not do it at all. More than a fortnight has passed since the first discovery of the empty tomb and I think we may now conclude that they have no intention of bringing their resurrection belief into the light of day. This could be for one of two reasons, I think. It may be that it is enough for them to have the satisfaction of “knowing” in their own minds that their master came out of the struggle on top. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the hopes they had centred on him were shown—so it seemed—to be utterly foolish and baseless; and their fond dreams and fancies were laid in ruins at their feet. Now—so they imagine—their leader’s resurrection demonstrates that they were not so foolish, after all, in their estimate of him. Their faith in him and in their own judgment has been vindicated in their own eyes. As a result they are perfectly happy and feel no need to seek vindication in the eyes of others.

The other possible reason is that they are shrewd enough to see that nobody outside their own circle would listen to such nonsense and that to talk about it to others would only invite scorn and ridicule. My own opinion is that it is probably for this reason that they have kept it to themselves and intend, it seems reasonable to infer, to continue doing so.

This being so, the mystery of the empty tomb ceases to be

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

one of practical concern and the need for anxiety disappears. The Nazarenes will do little harm by clinging to their foolish notions so long as they are not bothering anyone else with them. No doubt they will shortly be making their way back home to their old haunts and their former occupations; and I do not anticipate that we will ever hear any more of them. And so we can file this case quietly away.

I must, however, confess that it still holds a great deal of interest for me in an academic sort of way. I would like for my own personal satisfaction to get right to the bottom of it and to see just how it all came about—and I hope that I shall before long. I shall, of course, inform you at once whenever I am in a position to tie up any of the loose threads that remain. Meantime, Annas, we may put the matter out of the forefront of our thoughts.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Ten

My dear Annas,

The Jesus affair has flared up again and is much worse than before. Today is Pentecost, of course, and the Nazarene crowd have caused a fearful commotion. They have begun, after all, to proclaim publicly their blasphemous and nonsensical doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus and have succeeded in setting the whole city by the ears.

All their sympathizers—a little more than a hundred, it is estimated—were gathered together this morning when their mad obsession concerning the crucified carpenter seemed to overwhelm their minds and they began to make such a tumult that a large crowd was attracted, thinking no doubt that it was a drunken brawl and that they might see some fun. When the crowd had gathered, that big fisherman who is one of them, Simon by name, started to proclaim that Jesus was risen from the dead and from all accounts a great deal of excitement was engendered.

That, you may think, is bad enough, but, if it had been all, there would have been little reason for concern. Unfortunately and well-nigh unbelievably, large numbers of the listeners appear to have embraced the false teaching and to have made a public declaration of their intention to take their stand on the side of the Nazarenes. This makes the situation a great deal worse. You will not, I hope, misunderstand me when I say that. The situation is well within

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

my control. I am well able to handle it—and I will, never fear! But it is infuriating, all the same.

Not only is it infuriating, it is perplexing! This affair has had mysterious and puzzling features all along the line and this latest development is no exception. Why, it is seven weeks since Jesus was crucified and it was only two days later that the tomb was found empty and the Nazarenes were started on this ridiculous delusion that Jesus had risen from the dead. Why on earth did they wait until now before coming out into the open? Can you suggest one good reason for their delay, Annas? I had fears at the beginning that they would have a go at this sort of thing and attempt a preaching mission; but when the days passed and no whisper was made publicly, I became convinced that they were not going to make it public at all. I felt sure then that they had decided to keep their belief to themselves, either because they were afraid of us or because it satisfied their petty, stupid minds to nurse a supposedly secret knowledge of having bested us. But here they are—seven weeks afterwards—making their ideas a public nuisance.

I would have thought that if they were going to take this line, the best time to take it, from their point of view, was right away. I cannot see what they have gained by waiting. It is true that, most surprisingly, they seem to have made a spectacular start today and won a large crowd over to their persuasion. But that can be no more than a flash in the pan. No doubt when we get the details we shall find that their “converts” are some riff-raff of the city lacking enough intelligence or religious background to know what they

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

are doing. Nobody with any sense or with any religion could have anything to do with the doctrine they are preaching. It is an affront to intelligence to say that Jesus is risen from the dead, for whoever heard of anyone rising from the dead before; and it is equally a denial of our faith, for our Holy Scriptures make it plain that any man who is crucified is accursed in God's sight.

But I will tarry no longer over this letter, Annas. My information is somewhat sketchy and the reports are still coming in. I will send you a fuller appraisal of the position in the morning.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Eleven

My dear Annas,

What took place yesterday was even more disgraceful than first reports indicated. I have now a fairly full and clear picture of what happened—and you will be as shocked by it as I was!

What I told you in last night's letter has been confirmed. The Nazarenes, about a hundred and twenty of them, were met together in a house, a hullabaloo broke out, a crowd gathered, Simon the fisherman began to preach the resurrection of Jesus and many were (apparently) convinced and converted. Whether the preaching was planned or spontaneously embarked upon I do not know and it makes little difference anyhow. But I have more to tell you about the content of Peter's preaching. He had rather a lot to say, apparently, and it will not make any more pleasant hearing for you than it did for me. Not only did he allege that Jesus was risen from the grave, he said a great many other things as well. Two of these were particularly offensive.

First, he had the audacity to make a public accusation of us—yes, you and me and the rest. He asserted that we were murderers, that we had plotted against an innocent man (Jesus) who was none other than Messiah and foully contrived his death. What an impudent nerve the man must possess to behave in such an outrageous fashion! We were doing our obvious duty and my conscience for one is clear.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

All the same, we cannot tolerate this sort of thing. It is bad for discipline and good order. This illiterate fisherman and his henchmen will require to be taught a sharp lesson, and the sooner the better. I wonder what has possessed him, anyway. Does he fancy that he is better able to defy us than Jesus was? He ought to be remembering how we put an end to *his* troublesomeness and would be wise to take a warning from that.

But I have still to tell you the best of the story, or the worst of it, whichever you care to term it. The Nazarenes must be completely mad! Their delusion that Jesus is risen might well be taken as sufficient proof of madness even if there was nothing else. The fact that after a lapse of seven weeks they suddenly start shouting their nonsensical belief from the housetops, with the apparent expectation of getting others to accept it, is a further token of minds that are unhinged. So is their irrational and irreligious contention that the Jesus who was found guilty of blasphemy, who was condemned as a felon and crucified to death, is, after all, Messiah. And surely no sane person would stand up in public in this city under our very noses and call us murderers! Only a madman could fail to see how that is simply asking for trouble.

But what I have to tell you now caps everything else and is far and away the maddest thing of all. They are suggesting, Annas—and, mark you, this is sober fact—that Jesus is both Messiah and *Lord*. They are calling him Lord and trying to persuade their hearers to accept him as such. This is the worst blasphemy that has ever been heard of *and it must be stopped*.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

I can scarcely believe it yet, Annas, and I may tell you that my heart almost stopped beating when I learned of it. Even to contemplate it, never mind actually to hear it, revolts me as nothing else has ever done. Words fail me to describe how I felt when I was informed that the Nazarenes were calling Jesus "Lord" and thus ascribing divinity to him. I know that this will sound very far-fetched to you, Annas, but I can assure you that it is only too true.

It is shocking enough, in all consequence, that any Jew should attribute divine status to one born of woman and no good Jew would ever even dream of doing such a thing. That would be terrible enough blasphemy but this is blasphemy many times more horrifying. For the Nazarenes actually dare to allege divinity not only of a man, but of a man who *met his end by crucifixion*. I feel, Annas, as if I were in the throes of a dreadful nightmare. It would be impossible to believe Jews guilty of such vile blasphemy as this, were not the fact directly before us.

And as for the additional fact that they have somehow managed to persuade others to side with them in their blasphemy, that, I must confess, floors me completely. I told you already that the Nazarenes made a number of converts as a result of their preaching yesterday. I presume that means that these converts accept the claims the Nazarenes are making and are prepared to agree with them, not only that Jesus is Messiah, not only that he is risen from the dead, but also that he is divine. I cannot for the life of me conceive how any Jew, no matter how ignorant or how irreligious, could ever come to be persuaded of that. Some devil must

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

have got into the city—unless it was a drunken spree that caused people to lose their wits entirely. Perhaps, after all, it is a nightmare and I shall wake up soon. That would be a most blessed relief!

Meantime I will need to think and act on the assumption that it is no nightmare but blasphemous reality; and so there is need for action, ruthless action. This conduct simply cannot be tolerated. At all costs it must be stopped and you can take it for certain, Annas, that I shall see that it is.

I shall, of course, keep you posted promptly regarding future developments.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Twelve

My dear Annas,

I received your note that you were coming up to the city to stay overnight and I am sending this letter along to your palace so that you will have it as soon as you arrive tonight. I am extremely glad that you should have chosen this precise time for your trip home because I am convening a special meeting of the Sanhedrin for tomorrow morning and I shall be very grateful for your presence and support at it. Let me tell you what it is all about.

Two of the Nazarenes—two of the leading lights in the party, Simon the fisherman again and one called John—went to afternoon prayers in the Temple today. There they were accosted by a lame beggar asking for alms. They replied, apparently, that they did not have any money but that they would give him something better—they would make him well. *And they did.* In no time they had him walking about seemingly quite cured. How they did it, I do not know. But they did and, of course, in no time they had a large crowd round them, gaping and gawking at the cripple who had been made to walk.

Just as he had done before, the big fisherman seized the opportunity to promulgate their infamous doctrine concerning Jesus, accusing us of foully and illegally contriving his death and boasting that he had conquered the grave, and

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

was both Messiah and Lord. Once more Simon was somehow able to make an impact with his nonsensical chatter and I understand that a number of his hearers professed their wish to join his side. However, they did not get away with it scot-free this time. As soon as I heard of the disturbance—which fortunately I did very quickly—I sent my chief of staff and a squad of Temple Police to arrest them, and they are now safely ensconced in gaol.

I am bringing them before the Sanhedrin tomorrow morning and I hope to get the Council to agree to take strong measures against them. (That they will agree I am none too sure, knowing how many of them are timid and lukewarm, but I am confident that you, at any rate, will see that such action is what the situation demands.) Apart from the blasphemy of which they are guilty, a continuation of this sort of thing will threaten to undermine our discipline and authority. The whole affair is prejudicial to good order and, what is more, if we do not put an end to these public upsets we will have the Roman authorities down on us.

I shall call on you in the morning before the Sanhedrin is convened and shall look forward to a conversation with you then. I hope you have not found the journey too tiring.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Thirteen

My dear Annas,

I am writing this now so that you will have my comments on this morning's proceedings before you set out for the Dead Sea again.

So my pessimistic forebodings proved accurate and even you and I together were not able to push through the stern measures we were after! Mind you, I do not think we need blame ourselves. I honestly do not think we could have put the case any better. The sad fact is, Annas, that we had no chance from the start. There are far too many timid characters on the Council who could hardly be persuaded to say "boo" to a goose. They are the kind of people who, rather than take a strong line, would allow a dangerous situation to deteriorate until it became irretrievable. Blind to the dangers inherent in the present situation, they were easy prey for the arguments in favour of leniency put forward by soft old men like Gamaliel and traitorous sympathizers with the other side like Joseph and Nicodemus. No, Annas, our point of view did not stand a chance and the issue was finally clinched, if it needed any clinching, by the indisputable fact of the man who had been healed. That they had really healed him was beyond denial, for most of our Sanhedrin knew him and he is going about cured for all to see; and this fact had quite an influence, I feel, on many members of the Council, predisposing them to a gentler verdict than you and I would have liked.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

The decision of the Sanhedrin was a disappointment but not a surprise. I could sense what was coming even before the proceedings opened and, as I have said, I am quite sure that nothing we might have done or said would have made any difference. They will change their tune, however, and they will change it soon, mark my words! They might think they have dealt effectively with the matter in hand but I fancy that I know better—and so, I think, do you. The Sanhedrin's decision will have not the slightest effect on the Nazarenes, if I am any judge. When I reflect on this morning's proceedings, I would find them funny, were they not so tragic and humiliating—imagine the Jewish Sanhedrin *afraid* to take proper steps against two recalcitrant unlettered Galilaeans!

I can see the scene so clearly in my mind's eye and it makes me squirm. Here were two men of no special training or qualification who had been apprehended for causing a disturbance and for preaching blasphemy concerning one Jesus, their leader, who had been put to death by crucifixion. They are brought before the Sanhedrin to answer for their conduct, and what do they do? They practically fling their blasphemy in the Sanhedrin's teeth—and get away with it. With an arrogance which was crying out for severe punishment, that Simon fellow boasted that the cripple had been healed by the name of Jesus whom we had crucified. I never thought I would see the day when the Sanhedrin would be insulted so pointedly and their authority so flaunted with impunity; but that is what happened. The Sanhedrin have refused to follow our suggested line of action. "No, no,"

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

they said, "we must not be too impetuous. After all, the man *was* cured. He is there to be seen and no one can dispute what has happened to him. We would be asking for trouble with the people if, in face of that, we were too severe with his benefactors. Let us give them a warning, order them to stop preaching their false doctrine about Jesus and release them. That should be enough. They will surely not have either the effrontery or the foolhardiness to continue their malpractice."

These so-called arguments were nothing but a great volume of hot air and wishful thinking. The Sanhedrin's weakness will, I am convinced, have made matters worse rather than better. Treating the culprits as if they were naughty schoolboys and saying to them, "Now, you have been bad. Please do not do it again," is no answer to the problem at all. Simon and John will, I am sure, be chuckling over the whole business with their accomplices at this moment and the Sanhedrin's handling of the situation today will certainly not have put an end to their preaching. The day will come and come very soon, in my opinion, when the Sanhedrin will be falling over themselves in their haste to take the stern measures they spurned this morning. Meantime we must just wait for further developments.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Fourteen

My dear Annas,

We did not have long to wait before my judgment was proved right. The Nazarenes were scarcely out of the Sanhedrin's sight before they were up to their tricks once more; and I am writing to tell you that they are again under arrest. There is no need to give you a detailed account of their doings, for it is just the same story all over again. There was another big commotion—this time in Solomon's porch—even bigger, if anything, than before, because not only were there crowds of people standing listening to the Nazarenes' preaching, there were also crowds of sick people coming or being brought in the hope that the Nazarenes would heal them. I acted at once and had the whole company of Nazarenes arrested and put in prison. We shall have them before the Sanhedrin tomorrow morning and this time I think that our way of things will prevail. A great many of the Council are very uneasy over this latest event with its plain verdict on the uselessness of their previous all-too-lenient treatment. I am confident that they will be much more ready to listen to advice now. They will need to, for the affair has been allowed to go on far too long and far too far as it is.

I hope that you had a safe and pleasant journey down and that you are once more comfortably settled in your convalescent quarters.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Fifteen

My dear Annas,

Gamaliel is an old fool. He would be better dead! We would have got our way this morning if it had not been for his intervention. Most of the Council were feeling somewhat panic-stricken and more than somewhat guilty now that their chosen course of merely warning the Nazarenes had so quickly been proved ineffective. More than that, most of them were highly indignant that the Nazarenes should have so lightly and so blatantly disregarded their threats. Consequently they were, in the main, quite prepared and even eager to accept my suggestions—until Gamaliel got up to speak.

I felt apprehensive whenever I saw him rise and my fears were soon amply justified. I had the Council more or less in the hollow of my hand before Gamaliel started, but I could see their feelings slowly but surely begin to change as soon as the old man opened his mouth. His ideas are antiquated and out of touch with reality—but he still carries a tremendous popularity. That is what did it. It was not the pleading that convinced them. It was the fact that Gamaliel was doing the pleading. So far as some of them are concerned, Gamaliel needs only to give utterance on any issue and it may be considered settled. They seem to think him infallible.

Well, he was fallible enough this time. "Do not be hasty.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

Do not be violent," he counsels. "Just leave these men alone. Things will work out right, never fear. God will see to that. If you interfere, perhaps you will find yourselves fighting against God. If this is a bad thing, it will perish of its own accord; if it is a Godly thing, it will succeed, irrespective of any interference. Leave it alone in the meantime." So speaks Gamaliel, and at once a crowd of them, thinking to be thought wise, nod their heads and say, "Gamaliel is right. We must, of course, do what he advises."

The truth is, on the contrary, that Gamaliel is wrong, utterly wrong; and if the Sanhedrin were not in the habit of suspending its critical faculty when Gamaliel speaks, it must have seen for itself that he is wrong. His argument is quite unsound and his attitude is a refusal to face up to the facts and to the demands of reality.

"If this affair is of God . . ." says Gamaliel—but we know beyond doubt that the affair cannot be of God. Gamaliel is allowing his sentimental softheartedness to overrule his head. How can blasphemy be of God? That is the question he ought to have been asking himself and that is the question the Council members ought to have been asking themselves, too. It's all very well saying, "Let us be patient, this will work itself out. Let us be merciful, and give them the benefit of the doubt." But that kind of argument just does not apply in this case, for here there is no doubt. The Nazarenes are self-evidently a blasphemous, trouble-making sect and we are failing in our duty if we merely sit back and say, "God will attend to it". We are the servants of God and He has a right to expect us to put down at once anything that is hostile to Him.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

That is what we ought to be doing here, putting down this nonsense and putting it down without compunction; and that is what it will come to in the end. Mark my words, kid-glove methods will never be of any avail. We shall have to be strong and stern to put an end to this—and the sooner the Sanhedrin come to recognize the necessity for such action the sooner will God and the welfare of the nation be served.

Meantime, however, we must work as effectively as we are able within the limits set by the stupidity of the weaker-kneed members of the Council. That means engaging the Nazarene preachers in debate and cross-questioning. I have delegated a number of our best dialecticians to go into action at once along these lines. I have little hope that this will wean Jesus' original disciples from their folly but it ought certainly to put an end to their proselytizing. Once our men have publicly exposed the flaws and errors in the Nazarenes' case, no man in his senses could possibly entertain the thought of siding with it—and this should prove an easy task for our debaters.

It will be ridiculously easy, I fancy. The Nazarene side is not endowed with well-educated persons and in particular it has no lawyer, skilled in the art of argument and debate. My team, on the other hand, is made up of such men, whose whole lives have been devoted to the study and practice of such things. If I may employ a colloquialism, Annas, my men will have no trouble in making mincemeat of the Nazarenes and whatever they might have to say. After all, everything is on their side. They have the learning, the skill, and the experience; they have prestige, influence and

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

authority in the eyes of the people; and they have the supreme advantage of being on the side of truth. The doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus, which is the basis of the Nazarenes' claim, is, to any thinking person, manifestly absurd and impossible, and it will be the easiest thing in the world for our debaters to demonstrate that to the public.

Yes, Annas, the more I consider it the more reassured I feel. I was perturbed by the decision of the Sanhedrin this morning and I was at first disposed to anticipate a wider spread of this pernicious heresy before we got it finally stamped out. But now I am inclined to think that I was over-estimating its strength and its dangers. I am still of the opinion that eventually we shall have to employ violent repressive measures against the ringleaders. I am, however, now confident that through argument and debate the further spread of the poison can be and will be arrested forthwith and that much of the ground already lost will be swiftly regained.

Their "resurrection of Jesus" position provides the Nazarenes with a very ramshackle fortress and the assaults of our men's questions and arguments will without doubt speedily demolish it. Our men will attack them on the streets, in the market-place and wherever the opportunity arises, and will do so tooth and nail. They will exploit to the full any weakness, real or apparent, in their case—and there must be many weaknesses in a case that rests on such a basic impossibility as resurrection from the dead. While, as I have said, this may not shake the Nazarene ringleaders themselves, it ought to be more than enough to prevent any

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

other fools from following after them and even to win back to sanity most of those who have already announced their intention of following.

It is not as if this doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus was something that any of our people would *want* to believe, or are in any way predisposed to believe. It is something which is offensive to their whole upbringing, background and religious knowledge. Their natural prejudice is all against accepting such a fantastic allegation. This makes it all the more inexplicable that anyone at all should ever have been persuaded by them, far less the numbers who have. I simply cannot understand how it has happened. But a public exposition of the errors of the Nazarenes and their doctrine should wrest their converts from their grip and ought certainly to ensure that no one else shall come to agree with them. That ought to take care of things in the meantime. It will prevent the further spread of this epidemic that the Nazarenes have started and once we get the Sanhedrin to see reason, which I hope and expect will be soon, we shall eradicate the disease completely *in our own way*.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Sixteen

My dear Annas,

The situation continues to deteriorate. Most inexplicably, contrary to all probability and contrary to all my expectations, the Nazarene heresy not only survives but grows. It is both galling and perplexing to discover that the full-scale counter-attack of argument and debate which I launched against their resurrection preaching is not achieving the desired and anticipated result. Our men, being skilled in argument and having all our resources behind them, ought, on the face of it, to be able to demolish any kind of false teaching without any trouble. When that teaching is in the hands of uneducated men, unskilled either in public speaking or in debate, the task ought to be one of all the greater simplicity. When, in addition, the false teaching is based on the preposterous allegation that a crucified man rose from the dead in this very city just a few weeks ago, the work of demolition ought to be child's play. By this time we ought to have seen the whole fallacy plainly exposed for what it is and to have witnessed the collapse of the whole affair. That, however, I am sorry to say, is far from being the case.

I was fully prepared to find that the original perpetrators of this outrage would stick to their guns blindly and foolhardily no matter how convincing the arguments put up against them. But I was sure that the publicizing of our

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

arguments, coupled with the public scrutiny of the Nazarenes' case by our debaters, would silence their public preaching or, at least, effectively prevent any more converts being made and probably also be enough to disillusion those who had already professed conversion.

Events have not, however, turned out as I expected. The Nazarenes, far from being silenced, are preaching as loudly, as frequently and as arrogantly as ever. We have no knowledge of any of the first converts being weaned from their false doctrine. Most astonishing of all, in face of all that our fellows have said and done, *new converts continue to be made.*

None of our questions, none of our arguments, none of our cross-examinations has budged the Nazarenes one inch from their position. We have not been able to catch them out or to trip them up on anything at all and they have made not a single damaging admission that might have been interpreted as giving their case away. The upshot has been, reluctant as I am to admit it, that while our men have all the advantages of voice, delivery, presentation of material and the rest, the listening crowd seems invariably to have ended up by being more impressed by the claims and pleadings of the Nazarenes. We have had them announcing allegiance to the sect practically under our very noses and in open defiance of the Sanhedrin's expressed view. The situation threatens to get out of hand and unless we can persuade our brethren in the Council—who are as stubborn as they are stupid at times—to use force, matters may get beyond us all together, and God alone knows what the Roman authorities might do then.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

The rock on which we keep perishing in the debates—as, indeed, in the whole affair—is this confounded fact of the empty tomb. We seem to be no nearer the solution of that mystery than we were at the beginning; and debate after debate and argument after argument keep breaking down, as far as we are concerned, at this point. If only we knew how they had done it, or if only we knew where the body was now, how easy it would be! But the trouble is that we do not know and we cannot break them down at all. They give absolutely nothing away even under the most rigorous cross-examination.

I had high hopes that one result of this debating assault would be to uncover some information about these puzzling matters. I did not think it possible that under the pressure our men can exert—and have exerted—not one of the Nazarenes would be trapped into giving the game away. I find it almost incomprehensible that they should, in fact, have given away nothing. In face of all our endeavours to shake them, they have maintained their story with unswerving consistency and have afforded no loophole whatsoever. As a matter of fact, the debates have tended to finish up with them, not us, holding the initiative. “If Jesus is not risen,” they will say, “how do you explain his empty tomb?” To this we, of course, reply, “You stole his body.” They come back with scornful questions such as, “How did we manage to do that? What about your guards? What about this, what about that?” And, finally they say, “Where then, did we put his body?” Until we squeeze some damning disclosures out of them or until we find the new location of

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

the body I am afraid we are going to make little headway along this line. It is enough for us, of course, as it should be enough for any intelligent person, that such things as resurrection simply do not happen and that, therefore, there must be some perfectly straightforward explanation of the empty tomb. But it is apparently not enough for the thick heads and obstinate minds with which we have to deal. It is amazing how some people will refuse to face up to facts.

What they all need, Annas, is a taste of something a great deal more severe than mere words. Punishment not argument is the medicine for this disease; and, the next opportunity that comes, I will see to it, if it is the last thing I do, that proper action is taken then. Pray that it will be very soon!

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Seventeen

My dear Annas,

Our time has come! We have an opportunity which simply cannot fail. One of the Nazarene preachers, a man called Stephen, is under arrest and waiting trial. Members of one of the city's foreign synagogues came and laid accusation of blasphemy against him and, acting upon that, I had him arrested at once. Their allegation is that Stephen stood up in the Synagogue and made blasphemous assertions concerning Moses and concerning God. Between you and me, I fancy they have acted out of pique more than anything else. So far as I can gather, they engaged in public debates with this fellow on the Jesus question and I rather think that they were badly bested in the exchanges and, smarting under their humiliation, hatched a plot to get their revenge by means of trumped-up allegations and false witnesses. Be that as it may, I do not care in the slightest. Here is the means to the end we desire. The Sanhedrin are bound to regard this very seriously and I mean to make the most of it. If I cannot now induce the Sanhedrin to let me go ahead and smite the Nazarenes hip and thigh, I am a Samaritan. I am sorry that you will not be present at the sitting.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Eighteen

My dear Annas,

I am happier than I have been since this resurrection farce first began to be played out; and, in the end, it was far easier than my fondest hopes had imagined. You would almost have thought that Stephen was doing his best to aid and abet my plans. I did not need to provoke him to rash speech, as I had purposed doing. He was only too eager to rush into it on his own and played right into my hands.

But I must tell you the whole story! We heard the recitation of the charges and the testimony against him, and then I asked Stephen for his defence. As I did so, I was hoping that he would not follow Jesus' example and maintain an infuriating silence. I need not have worried. He required no prompting but proceeded forthwith to deliver a long, pointed and exceedingly provocative harangue to the Council members. The more he talked the better I was pleased—not, of course, by the things he was saying but by the fact that he was saying them there and then. Normally I would have checked a prisoner early on if he had attempted to say such things as Stephen was saying. But I was perfectly happy on this occasion to let him talk and talk; for he was literally talking himself to death and talking our policy to acceptance and, consequently, I am sure, talking his own cause to a speedy extinction.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

I could sense the tide of hostile feeling rising steadily against him and his doctrine as he said one outrageous thing after another. Whether he himself failed to notice the mounting hostility or whether he just did not care, does not matter. All that does matter is that he continued to provoke the Sanhedrin more and more unbearably the longer his speech progressed. It was obvious by now that the issue of the trial was certain; this time there was going to be no reprieve and no foolish mercifulness. This time only the strongest measures would satisfy the Council; and Stephen had seen to it that the Council were going to demand such measures without any further prompting from me. These happy thoughts were running through my head when, suddenly, the storm broke. Stephen had just made a point-blank accusation of the Sanhedrin to the effect that they had murdered Jesus and he followed it up by saying that he could, at that moment, see Jesus standing at God's right hand. The Sanhedrin could stand no more. Someone shouted out, "Let us not listen to any more, brethren. Let us put an end to him." At once there was a mighty roar and they flung themselves upon Stephen and dragged him bodily away to kill him.

They were beside themselves with rage, and I doubt if I could have stopped them if I had tried. In any case, I did not wish to try. There was a risk, of course, in the Sanhedrin taking the law into their own hands like that and I was well aware of it. There was the very real risk of Pilate asking, in no uncertain terms, on his return to the city, why and how a man had been put to death in his absence and

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

without his consent. But I estimated that the risk involved was well worth taking. After all, it was as much the responsibility of Pilate's troops as it was mine—if, indeed, not more—to prevent this lynching taking place. He cannot surely blame me altogether. And if he should turn nasty, there is always the expedient of the judicious threat of a complaint finding its way to Rome concerning his administration. That expedient served us well before and there is no reason why it should not do so again.

And so, even though I clearly recognized the risk, I made no attempt to stop the killing, reckoning that the reward to be gained was too valuable to be spurned. For I could see that once the Sanhedrin had put Stephen to death, they would be irrevocably committed to a policy of severity and persecution against the Nazarenes. That action would open wide the floodgates of hate and violence in the path of all who owned the name of Jesus.

So I let them go on their errand without regret and with much exultation. They did not take long to carry it out. They hustled him outside the city, dragged him to a height and, without a moment's delay, threw him down. As soon as it was seen that the fall had not killed him, a perfect avalanche of stones and boulders cascaded on top of him and, although he managed to utter a few further words of defiance, he was soon dead.

There can be no turning back now! With this deed the Sanhedrin have irrevocably decided in favour of a policy of suppressing the Jesus-cult by force—and high time, too. This is the surest and the quickest way to deal with these

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

blasphemers. We have been much too soft with them all along, as I have kept telling the Council, and we have only ourselves to blame that their pernicious sect has thrived so much as it has. But we shall see a speedy difference now. People will not be so anxious to join the Nazarenes when they know it is going to mean persecution, and the crowds who have flocked to their side during the period of fair weather will, I am sure, be much less happy about their allegiance when they find that the weather has turned foul. I am supremely confident, Annas, that this is the way to deal with them and I think that it will take no time to prove me correct. On the instant you will see their hundreds of fine new recruits melting away like snow in summer sunshine. No doubt a few of the original diehards will persist in their folly, but we will be able now to give them the attention they deserve.

This is a glorious hour, Annas, and I shall sleep better tonight than I have been able to do for a very long time. "Operation Persecution" is launched at last and with feeling running so high as it is I shall have no difficulty in mobilizing a force of maximum ferocity and ruthlessness to carry it through to a swift and completely successful conclusion.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Nineteen

My dear Annas,

Better and better! The tide is certainly flowing with us now. I have had a visit from young Saul of Tarsus volunteering his services in the task of putting down the Nazarenes. He will be a tremendous asset to us and his assistance should enable us to exterminate them even more quickly than I had been anticipating.

I must remember, of course, that, with your frequent long visits to the Dead Sea, you are not so much in touch with things in general nowadays as you used to be and you may not know who Saul of Tarsus is. Well, he is a Pharisee of very rigid outlook and practice. He is also a Rabbi and is the most distinguished student to come through any of our Universities within living memory. He was present at the lynching of Stephen and, although he took no active part in it, was whole-heartedly in agreement with what was done. Now he has come along with this offer to assist in liquidating the Jesus-sect by force.

Annas, I am jubilant! We have made a great capture. What an acquisition this fellow will prove to be! You do not know him as I know him and may therefore find it difficult to understand my enthusiasm. But perhaps you will appreciate my confidence in his potential value to our cause when I tell you that I have decided to put him *in charge* of the campaign to root out the Nazarenes. Do you

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

think I have gone mad? I assure you, Annas, that I was never more sane and never more wise. When I give you the reasons motivating my decision, I am sure that you will heartily agree with it.

For one thing, I have encountered no other person with such a violent and uncompromising hostility towards the followers of Jesus and their resurrection doctrine. His hatred of them is even fiercer than my own. He does not appear ever to have come into personal contact with Jesus while the carpenter was alive, although I gather that he saw him and probably heard him, too, on one occasion at least; but his hatred of the very name of Jesus is of a quality and an intensity that surpass anything I have ever known. With such a man directing operations we can be perfectly certain that no effort will be spared and no opportunity will be neglected to put paid to the Nazarenes as quickly as possible.

For another thing, we could not have a more *able* person in charge of operations. Not only does he surpass all others in the vehemence of his passion for the task, he surpasses them also in his intellectual equipment for it. Take it from me, Annas, in Saul we have on our side one of the best brains of our age, if not of any age. His superb qualities of mind will stand him in good stead for the job in hand. Saul is not the kind of man to be content with a haphazard harrying of the heretics. His campaign will be carefully planned and will be as systematic as it is ruthless.

In addition, it is a factor of no little consequence that Saul is widely known as a man of passionately religious disposition. His motives in harrying the Nazarene sect will

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

be accepted by everyone as quite above suspicion and that will be a great help. With Saul in command, the campaign will gain much more whole-hearted support from the majority than we could have expected otherwise. For the inescapable fact is that in this matter our own hands are not clean and, if we were conducting the campaign entirely on our own, some people might consider that we were not acting from entirely disinterested motives. Everyone knows how much our pockets were hit by that outburst of the carpenter's over the booths of sacrifices and money-changing in the Court of the Gentiles and everyone knows equally well how furiously angry we were because of it. This is why there would be a danger that, if I personally supervised the campaign, some evil-minded people might be tempted to suspect my motives. I know that this danger is not of great consequence and, indeed, it is one I was fully prepared to take until the advent of Saul. Now that he has come forward, however, this particular risk can be entirely eliminated. Everyone will recognize his motives as patently sincere and disinterested and that very fact will in itself be the means of rallying more enthusiastic support to the cause and so hastening all the more the elimination of these accursed ones who have already been the cause of so much trouble.

Allied to this is the fact that Saul is held in great respect for his integrity of character and his high ethical standards. He has no peer in his rigid adherence to the Law and all it demands. When such a man accuses the new sect of being blasphemers, most people are going to accept his verdict without question; whereas you or I—we might as well face

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

up to it—making the same accusation would be less likely to command the same instantaneous approval.

You must agree, Annas, now that I have stated the case, that to put Saul in charge of operations against the Nazarenes will prove a master-stroke. I cannot conceive of any other single thing that would more effectively advance our purpose at this stage and it seems to me that the manner in which this opportunity has fallen unsought into our laps is confirmation—not that we needed any—that God is on our side.

How I am going to enjoy seeing these obnoxious people get what they deserve!

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Twenty

My dear Annas,

How vexingly frustrating the Jesus of Nazareth affair continues to be! Here we are, weeks after the persecution was begun, and we are far from being quit of it yet. I had hoped to be able long before this to write *finis* to the case and to put it all behind me, but still it lingers on. I know, of course, that it was probably recklessly optimistic of me to expect the movement to be completely crushed in a matter of days when its existence was to be measured now in terms of many months. I know, too, that results have been achieved. It was a tremendous shock to them when our full-scale offensive was launched, and many at once recanted their new faith. But a great many more have refused to do so despite every threat and every punishment that Saul has been able to bring to bear upon them, and these, I can assure you, have not been lacking in severity. True, apart from the original disciples, who have both stayed firm and stayed put, most of the Jesus-people have either gone underground or have fled the city. This, however, is far from being the happy state of affairs it might seem to be. As for the former, the fact that they are no longer openly active does not remove them. They are still with us—still following their false creed and still endeavouring to propagate it—and the fact that their activities are now more discreetly pursued merely makes it all the more difficult for our

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

men to put a finger on them. As for the latter, their flight has created new problems. They have scattered throughout the length and breadth of the land—and many of them have started up new branches of the sect in their places of exile. In a way it has been like kicking a fire of burning sticks. We have succeeded in thinning out the blaze at the centre but, in so doing, have spread it further afield. In other words, in some ways our problem has become more serious than ever, and Saul, in fact, has just been to see me about one aspect of it.

He is greatly perturbed and furiously angry about these runaways who have had the temerity to bring into being little centres of their blasphemy in other cities and towns. In particular he is incensed about those who have gone to Damascus and he is desperately anxious to get at them. He came to me and said that not only did he think it a matter of common justice that they should be punished for their sins but that to pluck them out of their retreat and deal with them would be such a salutary demonstration of our power and our determination as would provide a good example to many others. So he suggested that I should give him authority to extradite and send him to attend to them. This I readily agreed to do and he will set off tomorrow.

Let us pray that this shall have the effect for which Saul is hoping, for I am heartily sick of the whole thing and am longing to see it ended. It is high time Jesus was back in the grave where he belongs. To think that we are still so far short of complete suppression of the arrant heresy that says he is risen from the dead! If only we could have found out

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

what they did with his body! What a mystery that has been! Not a vestige of a clue, not a whisper of the truth, has ever come our way.

But we will put an end to it yet, even if it means slaying them to the last man.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Twenty-One

My dear Annas,

I have received a most peculiar (and extremely alarming) report. It gave me a scare at first but on reflection I am perfectly satisfied that it cannot possibly be true. Nevertheless, I thought it wise to acquaint you with it at once, especially since it is being freely discussed in the city and you are better to have the facts correctly before the tale travels down to you in any other form.

I had a messenger from Damascus today to inform me that Saul had gone over to the enemy. You will remember that about a fortnight ago I sent Saul to that city with letters of extradition in order to bring back for trial certain of the Nazarene sect who had escaped there. I sent with him a squad of the Temple Police and it was one of these who arrived back in Jerusalem bearing a message from his commander. This was to the effect that Saul had announced his intention of joining the sect of the Nazarenes and had actually gone to stay with one of them in Damascus, leaving the Temple Police to their own devices. The squad commander quite correctly felt that he must inform me at once of the new situation and so he sent one of his men back to report and to ask for instructions.

It gave me a terrible shock to receive these tidings and at first I felt that the bottom had fallen out of everything. For this, if it were true, would be the worst catastrophe possible.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

It would do our cause untold harm if Saul, our leading persecutor, should himself have embraced the Nazarene faith.

However, after the initial shock had worn off a little and I was able to think clearly, it became evident to me that it could not be true. It is quite incredible that it should be. Why, Saul is the last man in the world that anyone could possibly imagine turning Nazarene.

For one thing, he hates the Nazarenes like poison. The very name of Jesus is enough to incense him beyond words, and his hatred of the sect is so violent that you can almost feel it as a physical force.

Not only so, Saul is far too religious a man ever to be in any danger of siding with such blasphemy as the Nazarenes are propagating. He is as much aware as you and I that there is one God and one God only, and under no circumstances could he ever be prevailed on to count a man born of woman co-equal with God—which is, of course, part of the Nazarene heresy. Still less could he ever be persuaded to allow such a position to a man who had been put to death on a cross. He knows his Bible far too well for that and is well aware how it says in Deuteronomy xxi. 23, "He that is hanged is accursed of God". One could not conceive of Saul ascribing deity to Jesus of Nazareth even if the man had had a brilliantly successful career; but to imagine him ascribing deity to a Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified is ludicrous beyond words. This is an error into which one might, perhaps, imagine a Gentile falling, or, at a pinch, even a Jew who was not very religious or not well-versed in

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

his Scriptures; but for any devout Jew, acquainted with the Scriptures, the possibility hardly even exists as a remote prospect. For such a devout Jew as Saul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, fanatically keen on his religion and deeply immersed in its scriptures, the possibility cannot be said to exist at all.

Moreover, Saul is a man of outstanding intelligence and of extensive erudition. His is not a foolish mind that might be easily ensnared by any false doctrine, far less by one so blatantly false as that of the Nazarenes. Some people we might imagine being taken in by a fancy tale divorced from fact or having their reasoning faculties overpowered by an emotional assault. But Saul can on no account be fitted into either of these categories. Only the evidence of hard indisputable facts could possibly capture a mind like his, and the facts, as you know, are on our side, not on theirs. Now, Saul knows all the facts of the case in detail. On his being appointed commander-in-chief of the persecution I gave him immediate access to all our files on the matter, so that he is fully acquainted with the facts as we know them and see them—and is fully acquainted, too, with our explanations of the facts and with our refutations of the Nazarenes' arguments.

In view of all this and having seen Saul at work against the Nazarenes—he is so strongly predisposed against both them and their doctrine in every way that he will only reluctantly admit even the slightest vestige of good in any of them that he is interrogating—I know that the report which has come to me must be wrong. Whatever the true

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

explanation, it cannot be that Saul has been subverted to the heretic side. Why, that is quite as incredible as the resurrection of Jesus itself.

I have, of course, closely questioned the messenger and his replies suggest that the report sent to me has been made in all good faith. Accordingly, my own theory is this. I think that Saul must have suddenly hit on the idea of *pretending* to be won over to the Nazarene side and ingratiating himself with them until he can pull off a tremendous coup against them. That I fancy is what the explanation will turn out to be, and I must confess that I am far from pleased with Saul that he should have launched out on such a scheme entirely on his own. He ought to have informed me beforehand of his plans and sought my approval. And even if the idea struck him suddenly while he was on the way to Damascus he ought to have sent me word of what was afoot.

However, I have sent orders for the squad of Temple Police to return home at once and I shall get further information from their commander when he comes. By that time I expect I shall have further news, perhaps in the form of a letter from Saul himself. I wish he had not been so impetuous with this action of his, however well intentioned. It seems to me an extremely foolish one that will do us more harm than good. Think how this is going to puff up the ego of the Nazarenes and encourage their bravado! We will have them boasting and saying, "Even Saul of Tarsus has accepted our doctrine—surely that proves that we are right." The sooner Saul does what is in his mind to do and puts an

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

end to all such eventualities the better I will be pleased. But
I will keep you informed.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Twenty-Two

My dear Annas,

I am in the depths of despair. It has demanded a supreme effort of will even to write this letter with the information it has to convey. Even yet, when it has been proved beyond doubt, I do not really believe it. It is, nevertheless, my very painful necessity to tell you that the report of Saul's arraigning himself on the side of the Nazarene cause has now been completely confirmed. When I first heard the story I counted it absolutely incredible and I still cannot get away from its appearance of utter impossibility. The fact, however, is no longer capable of being disputed. Saul *has* embraced the Nazarene faith and, even worse, has already been preaching it publicly in Damascus. I have a number of witnesses who have heard him. They tell me that, speaking with great vehemence and passion and eloquence, he argued that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead and appealed to his hearers to believe in him since he was evidently, therefore, Messiah and Lord. To think that this is the same man who was sent well-nigh berserk by Stephen saying more or less the same things!

The fuller story of Saul's treachery, which I have obtained from the squad-commander, is as follows. Apparently, just after the party had come in sight of Damascus, some peculiar experience befell Saul. There was one of those short but violent electrical storms which are so common in that area

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

and, as there came a flash of lightning close by, Saul fell to the earth and was picked up blinded. He told his companions that Jesus of Nazareth had spoken to him at that moment, that he knew now that he had been on the wrong tack all the while, that Jesus was risen indeed and that he (Saul) was going to follow him from then on. Did you ever hear such nonsense? Saul always struck me as being perfectly sane but he must have some mental instability about him after all—these brilliant intellectuals often have. Even so, his defection must remain a great mystery, for why on earth should his madness take this particular form?

At any rate, however it came about, the very tragic fact is that it has happened and how harmful the consequences might be I am afraid even to contemplate. It is a sickening blow to all that we have been scheming and working for these many months and must, I fear, seriously delay the final putting-down of this accursed heresy. In passing this judgment, I am thinking not only of how much we are going to miss Saul from our side nor simply of the inevitable dislocation of plans caused by his sudden desertion. I am thinking, perhaps even more, of the effect his desertion is likely to have on the Nazarenes themselves and on the general public. The Nazarenes, I am very much afraid, are going to have their confidence immeasurably increased by the winning of Saul to their side. They are going, on the one hand, to find in this further ground for asserting that they are right and that we are wrong; and, on the other hand, they are going to have a telling point to cast in the teeth of any who attempt to challenge them on their belief.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

As for the man in the street, my fear is that Saul's change of allegiance will make him all the more ready to become ensnared by the persuasions of the other side—and God knows that he has been much too ready as it is.

But I am not in a fit state to write any more at the moment. The shock has been so unexpected and so severe that for the moment my mind is practically numb and I find it almost impossible to think coherently. I will communicate with you again as soon as I am able to view the situation with some degree of detachment and clarity. For the present my feelings are those of the blackest despair. This seems to me the last straw, the climax of a vexatious series of disappointments and frustrations, and, if the matter were not so important, I think I would throw the whole thing up and leave these hateful Nazarenes to their own devices.

Greetings,
Caiaphas

Letter Twenty-Three

My dear Annas,

My spirits are still at a very low ebb and I feel as if my heart will never recover from the blow dealt it by the news of Saul. Since I wrote you last, I have been spending a considerable time reviewing the whole sequence of events in this Nazarene trouble but the sole consequence has been to make me more depressed than ever. How infuriatingly difficult an affair it has turned out for us and what a succession of exasperating circumstances it has thrown up! On the face of it, the whole business should have lasted no time, should never really have happened, indeed; and yet here it is, still with us, more than a year old. Frankly, it is the most inexplicable thing I have ever encountered and there are not a few bewildering details in its story.

How the thing ever made a beginning at all is extremely difficult to understand. I know for a fact that Jesus' disciples were left utterly crushed and broken by their leader's crucifixion. I simply cannot understand how these same people could have undergone such a radical change within less than forty-eight hours. Jesus was crucified on the Friday and on that day they were as craven-hearted, spiritless and self-pitying a bunch as anyone could ever have seen. On the Sunday they emerged with a joyfulness and a confidence and a courage that seemed almost miraculous.

How this transformation came about we have never been

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

able properly to explain. It would appear without any doubt to be a consequence of their fixed obsession that Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to them. This, however, is not to explain the mystery but merely to push it one stage further back. How on earth did they ever get such a fantastic notion into their heads in the first place? I would stake my career on it that they had not the faintest thought of any such eventuality on the Friday. How, then, had they come to believe in its occurrence by the Sunday? You will see that I am taking for granted, as I think the evidence compels us to do, that they were and are utterly sincere (though, of course, grossly mistaken) in their resurrection belief. I think it is quite certain that nothing but a completely sincere conviction that Jesus was risen could have occasioned in them the change of spirit and outlook which took place, not to speak of the enthusiasm they have shown for their doctrine and their ready willingness to suffer and to die for it.

The more one examines the affair the more mysterious and the more difficult it is seen to be. Right here at the outset this was the enigma confronting us. On the one hand, the only thing that could possibly explain the tremendous change effected in Jesus' disciples was the fact that they sincerely believed Jesus was risen and had appeared to them; on the other hand, there was the near impossibility of accounting for the origin of this belief.

Had the belief taken some little time to arise the explanation would have been easy. Then we would have had no difficulty in accounting for it in terms of a gradual self-

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

delusion. Their sorrow at losing their leader would gradually be overlaid with the desire to have him back again which in time would lead them to a sub-conscious convincing of themselves that he had conquered death and returned to them. Oh, yes, if there had been any considerable lapse of time between Jesus' execution and the belief that he was risen, we would have had not the slightest difficulty in explaining it. But the baffling factor is that there was no such lapse of time. Everybody knows that the resurrection belief followed hard on the heels of the crucifixion.

The difficulties which we faced in attempting to suppress this resurrection nonsense were greatly aggravated by the fact that Jesus' body had disappeared from its grave by the Sunday morning. This is an indisputable fact, as most of us have seen for ourselves, and it has not proved easy to account for it. The only possible explanation is that the Nazarenes themselves removed the body surreptitiously (I say *only* possible explanation, Annas, because your "Swoon" suggestion cannot really be taken seriously). But while it was easy enough to arrive at this conclusion, it has proved inordinately difficult to substantiate it. Despite all the difficulties with which the body-stealers must have had to contend, they appear to have succeeded in carrying out their nefarious deed without leaving the faintest trace behind them. At any rate, our most diligent investigations and our most ruthless interrogations have produced not the smallest shred of evidence. No one seems to have caught the faintest glimpse or heard the faintest sound while they were about their task.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

What proved even more perplexing and even more frustrating was our complete failure to locate the body. Quite obviously the finding of the body was our most important objective and success in this would have meant total success and a strangling at birth of the child which has since grown to such troublesome proportions. How we failed I still cannot understand. I would not have thought it possible that the kind of search we made could have left the body of a dead mouse undiscovered, far less the body of a dead man. The area in which the body might have been secreted was a limited one, and every part of it, likely and unlikely alike, was gone over with painstaking thoroughness—but to this day no trace of the vanished corpse has been found. It is easily the most baffling mystery I have ever been unfortunate enough to come across. And even after all this time no whisper of the truth—of how they did it or of where they laid him—has come to our ears. It has been the most audacious coup and the best-kept secret of the century. How they managed it I simply cannot understand. They must, of course, have been extraordinarily lucky but, even when they are granted all the luck that is possible, it is still a mystery beyond my powers of comprehension that such a collection of semi-illiterates should have bested us the way they did.

Since, however, I have set myself the task of marshalling the most bewildering features of a very bewildering business, I must pass on to the next mystery. Having stolen the body out of its tomb, the Nazarenes proceeded to convince themselves that their Jesus had risen from the dead. On the face of it, it would appear to be manifestly impossible that such

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

a thing could happen. How they could one day plan and carry through a gigantic hoax and the next day be themselves taken in by it is another thing that utterly defeats my understanding. But that is what happened and it changed them almost out of recognition. You could practically see them becoming new men before your eyes. Instead of the frightened, dispirited, weak creatures that they were on the day of their leader's crucifixion, they were all at once transformed into men of boldness, confidence and strength. Instead of being in terror of us, as they had been, they did not seem to care a rap for any threat we made or even for any action that we took. They openly paraded their false doctrine in the very streets of the city and deliberately flouted our every effort to silence them.

And still the perplexities continued to pile up! It was strange enough that we should have Jews proclaiming their allegiance to one who had been crucified and that they should assert that this crucified one was risen from the dead. It was, I say, mystifying that any Jew should be found to believe in such fantastic chatter. But it was equally mystifying to find that they were managing somehow to persuade others to share their belief. Jews of Jerusalem, some of whom had actually seen Jesus die and all of whom knew the circumstances of his death, and who knew that such a man must, according to the scriptures, be accursed of God, were being induced to believe that this Jesus was, on the contrary, favoured of God and that he was raised from the dead. It was quite beyond any sane man's comprehension and yet it was taking place.

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

What was even stranger, some of our own priestly party embraced the new heresy. Now these were intelligent and educated men. Moreover, they knew the ins and outs of the facts much more fully than it was possible for the common people to know them. It was difficult enough to understand how any of the laity could be addle-pated and credulous enough to accept such a preposterous tale as the Nazarenes were telling. It was ten times more difficult to understand how any of the much better informed and keener-minded clergy should be talked into the same blasphemy. Yet some of them were!

Even the very extent of the blasphemy which the Nazarenes were sponsoring was such that it must have seemed quite impossible to us that anyone could believe it—did we not know differently. Not only did they claim that their crucified Jesus was risen, they went so far as to acclaim him as divine. Now these men were Jews brought up amid our teaching and our tradition, men who ought to have known beyond forgetting that there is but one God; and yet they perpetrated such blasphemy as to put Jesus side by side with Him. Common sense would say that such an occurrence was incredible—but we know that it took place. Common sense would say that it was still more incredible that the original misguided blasphemers could prevail on others to share their blasphemy—but we know that this also took place. Common sense would tell us that it was even more incredible that any of the knowledgeable, level-headed, intelligent priestly class should be ensnared by this folly—but we know that this, too, took place. And all these things

LETTERS OF CAIAPHAS TO ANNAS

occurred in spite of the best counter-arguments that we could put forward and in spite of the best efforts of our best dialecticians and occurred, too, in spite of our threats, our warnings and our persecution. It is most bewildering.

But perhaps the most bewildering happening of all has been the defection of Saul. I would have thought that the Nazarenes had no more chance of capturing Saul's allegiance than they had of capturing mine. His hatred of them was positively venomous and no one was more aware than he of the utter impossibility and terrible blasphemy of their central doctrine of Jesus' resurrection. He harried and persecuted them with every atom of his strength and poured the most vitriolic scorn and ridicule upon their beliefs at every opportunity. I would have staked my life that such a man as Saul could never, under any circumstances, have been brought to believe that the Nazarenes were right after all. Yet that is just what has happened. It is another in a whole series of apparent impossibilities that have become fact.

I feel as if I am living in a nightmare from which I cannot wake up. I simply cannot make head or tail of the sequence of events. They seem to be beyond explanation—unless, of course, unless . . . but that does not bear contemplating, for it simply cannot be true. I must close.

Greetings,
Caiaphas